ENGADINE & HEATHCOTE ANGLICAN

Electronic Communication Policy

Faithfulness in Service (2017) states:

5.32 - When meeting a child[1] privately, you should:

- have consent from the parental, guardian, or primary care giver, where practicable;
- ensure where appropriate that a parent, guardian or suitable adult is present;
- inform another member of the clergy, an adult church worker or another adult of the time, location and duration of the meeting;
- not invite or have children to your home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present; and
- make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any meeting where it is impracticable to follow these guidelines.

5.46 - When considering using technology for communication, you should apply the same principles as you would in any other form of communication with children. You should take care that:

- it is an appropriate way to communicate with a child;
- it is an appropriate way to communicate about the matter;
- you are sensitive to the impact of your words, images and actions on the child and any other person who may access it;
- you do not use sexually suggestive, explicit or **offensive language** or images; and
- the circumstances of the communication, including the language and images used, do not suggest your relationship with the child is inappropriate.

Pastoral Care and general communication are an integral part of children's ministry and youth ministry, and is something that is to be encouraged in ministry. Pastoral Care for children and youth will be primarily through face to face contact. However, this is not always possible, and church workers may have to 'meet' with children and young people through electronic communication. Section 5 of *Faithful in Service* outlines standards and Guidelines for relating to children and young people.

General Electronic Communication

Interaction with children and/or young people by these means should be kept to a minimum. Parental permission must be sought before a church worker communicates to a child/young person with electronic communication (use the *"Parental Permission Form of Heathcote Engadine Anglican Church"*). Church workers must not knowingly transmit, retrieve, or store any communication that is:

- Discriminatory or harassing;
- Derogatory to any individual or group;
- Obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic;
- Defamatory or threatening;
- In violation of any licence covering the use of software; or
- For any purpose that is illegal or in contradiction to the Anglican Diocese of Sydney Safe Ministry Guidelines (*Faithfulness in Service*).

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[1] *Whilst this document directly references children, the same rules and guidelines apply to interactions with other young persons, and vulnerable persons.*

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Communication should general be restricted to "purpose only" communication (e.g., *'meet at this place at this time'*). Communication should generally not be a closed, one-to-one conversation.

Church workers must not use or send any electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender, or represent the sender as someone else.

- *Telephone / Oral Communication* When contacting the child / young person by phone, call on the home phone if possible.
- Ensure, whenever possible, that the parents / guardians are aware of the phone call.
- Mobile phone use should be kept to a minimum, and should never be used for long calls, especially in the case of pastoral care;
- If a child / young person initiates a mobile phone call which will require a long conversation, then (at the appropriate time) transfer the call to the home line (if available).
- Other forms of communication (such as VOIP, FaceTime, Hangouts, Skype, and the like) are also to follow the above guidelines.

Written Message Communication

- All emails to children / young people should have eac@eac.org.au copied into them.
- Messages should generally be restricted to "purpose only" (e.g., *'meet at this place at this time'*), or general conversations (e.g., *'how was the excursion today?'*). Deeper conversations regarding more personal issues should be face to face.
- As far as is possible, save all messages to and from children / young people in a separate soft copy folder.

Short Message Communication

- Short Message Communication (SMS, WhatsApp, Google Messenger, and so on) should generally be restricted to "purpose only" (e.g., *'meet at this place at this time'*).
- If a longer conversation begins, ring the child / young person, preferably on the home phone line.

Social Networking Websites, Applications, and Programs

There are many such forms of electronic communication sites, programs, and applications. These include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Myspace, MSN, ICQ, Kik, Pinterest, Tumblr, and WhatsApp. New programs will continue to arise. The use of such devices for communication with children and/or young people should be restricted to sites that are not open to third party intervention. They should be used as follows:

- Communications should be kept to a minimum, kept public where possible, and maintain only a broad nature (e.g., *'hey, hope you're having a good week, cya Sunday'*), or other light conversation.
- Do not give out any details of children / young people (e.g., surname (or first name, if that isn't used in the program), name of school, email address, home address, phone number, etc.).
- If a child / young person invites you into a conversation, you should bring in another leader as a third party, or excuse yourself from the conversation. Ask to talk in person or by phone, as noted above.
- Certain apps (e.g., Snapchat, Kik) may not be appropriate in any situation, and further digression may be required. Ask the head leader, if you are unsure.
- Church workers should use discernment and wisdom when having multi-person conversations. Your conversation should be above reproach.
- If you become aware of inappropriate behaviour between children / young people in their online communications (e.g., language, threats, bullying, etc.), the matter should be immediately brought to the attention of the leader and Senior Minister for appropriate action.

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Photographs

- *Any photos of youth or children's ministry activities should be taken by someone appointed by the minister, and with parental consent.*
- *Do not photograph any child or young person who has asked not to be photographed.*
- *Photography should focus on the activity, and not on a particular child or young person.*
- *Photography should focus on groups rather than individuals.*
- *Do not identify in writing the person(s) in the photograph.*
- *Do not post photos (eg onto Facebook or Instagram) without consent from the appropriate parents or care givers.*

Risks Associated with Electronic Communication

Clergy, church workers and other participants in church activities – including children – often communicate using texting and picture messaging, email, instant messenger services and chat rooms, video conferencing, blogs and internet forums, websites, and group social networking sites.

Remember, information posted online is tracked and can be retrieved. Dangers associated with the use of communication technology with children are not always appreciated by clergy and church workers. These dangers include:

- ignoring personal security settings on social networking sites;
- disclosing contact details or images of the child in the communication;
- being unable to determine if people are who they say they are;
- exposing the child to unwanted or inappropriate information;
- the child becoming a victim of cyberbullying; and
- sexual predators gaining access to the child.

Clergy and church workers can assist children to stay safe when using technology to communicate with others by:

- educating children and their parents or guardians about the risks associated
- with the use of this technology;
- encouraging children to exercise care in disclosing personal information about themselves and others such as their contact details;
- encouraging children to talk about anything that worries them with their parents or guardians, older siblings, friends, and clergy and church workers with whom they have a pastoral relationship instead of posting their problems in a chat room or blog; and
- encouraging children to talk about anything they see or experience online that worries them.